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SENSITIVE
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NSC FOR MGAVIN, LETIM
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GENEVA FOR NKYLOH
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SUBJECT: OCTOBER HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE MEETING FOCUSES ON DARFUR
SECURITY CONCERNS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The expanded High-Level Committee (HLC) met on October 28. Committee members discussed key challenges in the humanitarian operating environment in Darfur as a follow-up to the recent HLC visit to El Geneina, West Darfur. Much of the discussion focused on the October 24 abduction of an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) international staff member near El Geneina, West Darfur. The UN and donors including Deputy Chief of Mission Asquino called for an end to impunity for perpetrators of such crimes.
End summary.

DONORS, UN CONDEMN WORSENING INSECURITY

¶3. (SBU) Meeting co-chair Deputy Special Representative to the UN Secretary-General (DSRSG) and UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) Ameerah Haq thanked the Government of Sudan (GOS) for its arranging the recent West Darfur HLC visit, noting that the visit was shortened and the delegation reduced to focus specifically on safety and security for humanitarian workers in the wake of the ICRC staff kidnapping. Haq welcomed the release of two GOAL international staff members, whom kidnappers had held for more than 100 days, and recognized GOS efforts to facilitate negotiations leading to their release. However, the DSRSG noted that the escalating level of violence and the climate of impunity surrounding these attacks remained unacceptable, stating that "NGOs seeking to help the people of Darfur should be able to do so without fear." The DSRSG recommended the immediate establishment of a sub-committee comprising a smaller group of HLC members to address safety and security concerns facing humanitarian staff.

¶4. (SBU) Debriefing the committee on the West Darfur HLC visit and echoing the DSRSG's comments, the head of the UK Department of International Development (DFID)/Sudan read a statement, which the USG and the European Union (EU) endorsed, identifying the ICRC kidnapping as a "new low" in the Darfur operating environment and calling for strong action to deter criminal actions and protect humanitarian workers. The statement condemned impunity for perpetrators and noted that ransom payments to secure staff release are unacceptable and only encourage further abductions. In addition, the statement referenced NGO messages during the HLC visit to El Geneina regarding the negative impact that insecurity continues to have on program delivery and outreach, particularly to rural areas. Donors stressed that the deteriorating operating environment, particularly with regard to attacks on international relief staff, precludes development in Darfur, especially outside of IDP camps, and hampers humanitarian support for rural populations and possible returns.

GOS RESPONDS WITH SECURITY ASSURANCES

15. (SBU) Responding to the UN and donor statements, GNU Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) Commissioner Hassabo Mohamed Abdul Rahman assured all parties of the GOS commitment to the security of humanitarian agencies working in Darfur and to the safe release of hostages without payment of ransom. However, several GOS representatives, including the HAC Commissioner, HLC co-chair and Minister for Humanitarian Affairs Haroun Lual Ruun, and the GOS Ministry of Interior representative, expressed frustration regarding what they claimed was a lack of NGO cooperation with the police, security officials, and judiciary on security issues.

16. (SBU) While commending NGOs for "doing a good job in a difficult security environment," Hassabo called for increased coordination on security issues on the part of humanitarian agencies. He stressed that NGOs must cooperate with and defer to security officials when hiring local staff, including drivers and security guards, alleging that some of the kidnapping and banditry incidents could originate from within the NGOs. (Note: NGOs already participate in a lengthy staff vetting process with the HAC to hire local and international workers. End note.) The HAC Commissioner and Minister for Humanitarian Affairs both asserted that NGOs often do not fully participate in criminal investigations, stating that "without good information, we can't have justice."

17. (SBU) The GNU Ministry of Interior (MoI) representative supported the statements of the Minister and the HAC Commissioner, placing some of the blame for recent insecurity in Darfur on the international community. The MoI official said international donors

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had failed to play the promised role in strengthening police capacity as outlined in the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). (Note: Provisions of the DPA have never been implemented due largely to non-compliance by the GoS and lack of support by rebel group non-signatories to the agreement. End note.) In the MoI official's view, if donors had followed through with DPA provisions to improve rule-of-law in Darfur through establishment of police stations and police forces among internally displaced persons (IDPs), the current level of attacks on humanitarian staff would have been avoided.

18. (SBU) In addition, the MoI official blamed the United Nations-African Union Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and humanitarian agencies for what he said was presence of armed movements operating openly in IDP camps. He alleged that the camps served as training centers and safe havens for criminal elements. In closing, the official expressed support for the role that NGOs play in Darfur and asked for further cooperation to "remove these difficulties together."

19. (SBU) DSRSG Haq responded by noting the need for future dialogue regarding security as part of the proposed HLC security sub-committee. Haq highlighted the complexity of establishing security procedures among various government and international stakeholders due to the humanitarian principles involved in the Darfur context. Later in the meeting, participants endorsed the HLC Monitoring Mechanism, including new sub-committees on security at the state and federal level.

GOVERNMENT CONFUSION ON PROTECTION

110. (SBU) Following the security discussion, the representative of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) noted that the MoI's presentation had touched on issues related to security and humanitarian protection--distinct, yet sometimes interrelated concepts. The GOS Ministry of Defense official stated that humanitarian agencies' definition of protection remains unclear, with various messages espoused by UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and ICRC. The defense official asked that the international community come to a consensus on the matter and share clear information with Sudanese government

representatives. UNHCR agreed to follow up with a protection workshop and training.

¶11. (SBU) This lack of clarity on protection issues among Sudanese government representatives was highlighted during comments by HAC Commissioner Hassabo. Hassabo strongly recommended a merger of the protection sector working group and the new security sub-committee, as, in his view, these groups were essentially discussing the same issues and comprised the same GOS stakeholders. However, the UNHCR representative clarified that the protection sector working group should remain distinct, as humanitarian protection focuses on the protection concerns affecting Darfuri beneficiaries and not on security of aid workers.

JOINT RETURNS MECHANISM APPROVED

¶12. (SBU) Turning to the next agenda item, HLC co-chair MoHA Haroun tabled the Joint Verification Mechanism on IDP returns. The mechanism proposes "to help ensure that returns in Darfur are sustainable by enabling IDPs to exercise a free, informed, and voluntary choice to return to their areas of origin in safety and dignity, where and when appropriate." (Note: This objective statement is consistent with international humanitarian principles on internal displacement. End note.) The terms of reference document established the composition of a Joint Verification Sub-Committee, including the HAC Commissioner and the UN RC/HC as co-chairs, as well as representatives of the GOS National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), UNAMID, UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, and IOM, international NGO members, one national NGO representative, and one IDP representative, and other HLC members on an ad hoc basis. HLC participants observed that the Joint Verification Mechanism only establishes the criteria for the appropriateness and voluntary nature of returns and does not elaborate on assistance options when returns are verified as such. DSRSG Haq stated that, upon HLC approval, the first task of the new HLC Joint Verification Sub-Committee would be to investigate next steps following returns verification. The HLC approved the mechanism without objection.

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COMMENT

¶13. (SBU) The monthly HLC meeting provided a timely and constructive venue to raise donor concerns over GOS commitments to humanitarian staff security. Donor representatives, including the USG, stressed the importance of concrete action against perpetrators and the need for improvements on the ground. The outcomes of the new security sub-committee will serve as a first test on this issue.